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CARTER ASKS CHURCHES TO TAKE ENERGY LEAD

WASHINGTON, D. C. -- A White House breakfast for a wide range of religious leaders became a forum for a presidential call for American churches to support energy conservation efforts.

President Jimmy Carter told 125 officers from Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish traditions that inasmuch as "we are stewards" of God's creation, "the conservation of oil has religious connotations." His remarks opened a day-long consultation on Jan. 10 on energy which had been organized by a number of religious groups.

Episcopal Church representatives included Mrs. Alice Emery, Executive for the National Mission in Church and Society office of the Episcopal Church Center; the Rev. Charles Cesaretti, Public Issues Officer at the Center and the Rev. Sherrill Scales of the Episcopal Church Building Fund and the Interfaith Forum on Religion in Art and Architecture.

In his 13-minute extemporaneous remarks, Mr. Carter said there are "two ways to resolve the energy crisis: produce more energy, preferably renewable energy. . . (and) conservation and the elimination of waste."

The President emphasized that conservation does not have to mean a drastic scaling down of the lifestyle of Americans. "It is not a sacrifice to eliminate waste," he said. Furthermore, he continued, conserving energy could result in the "growing together of families" as they spent more time at home with one another instead of using the family car.

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Mrs. Emery said that the President's remarks were helpful in setting the tone of the gathering, because "he could speak out of his religious convictions to people who would understand what it means to be stewards of God's creation." She added that because of that call to stewardship, "It is entirely appropriate that we conserve, yet our past style has really been contrary to that."

She agreed with others at the conference that the churches could have a major role in sensitizing church members to both a theology of stewardship and the simple steps by which government officials estimate oil importation could be ended.

"The conference emphasized," Scales affirmed, "that there is a need for conservation education and for relating that to a moral and theological understanding of stewardship. The greatest value of the conference was the recognition that the churches can play a role and the need to work cooperatively to do so."

The Episcopal Church Building Fund, Scales said, has prepared energy guidelines for churches and is working to bring these up to date. The Fund also works with Cesaretti and the Public Issues Office on education material and with the Church Insurance Company on programs to aid churches. Some loan money is available to congregations for energy emergencies and for conversion systems and a number of dioceses also have funds for this purpose.

At meeting's end the participants mandated the consultation steering committee to develop a concrete proposal for cooperative action. Among the suggestions from the floor were:

- an energy conservation Sabbath, or weekend, during which churches and synagogues would concentrate on energy issues;
- aid to poor families struggling to pay for winter heat;
- workshops across the country on saving energy in church and synagogue buildings, as well as on installing solar heating units and other devices;
- commitment of more staff and funding to energy issues;
- investment of church and synagogue funds in the development of technologies for conservation and renewable energy;
- and increased use of carpooling, flexible work hours and other means of cutting down on fuel consumption.

A high point of the meeting came when the Rev. Lee Poole of the First Presbyterian Church in Washingtonville, N. Y., described the homemade solar heating unit his church uses to help heat all of its buildings.

To applause and laughter from the crowd, Poole described how a contraption consisting of little more than wood, glass and beer cans has saved his church close to 1,000 gallons of oil a year.

Poole added that he has already received more than 7,000 requests for information on how to duplicate his efforts, a fact that reflects the central premise of the day's events: that America's churches and synagogues are ready to save energy.

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